

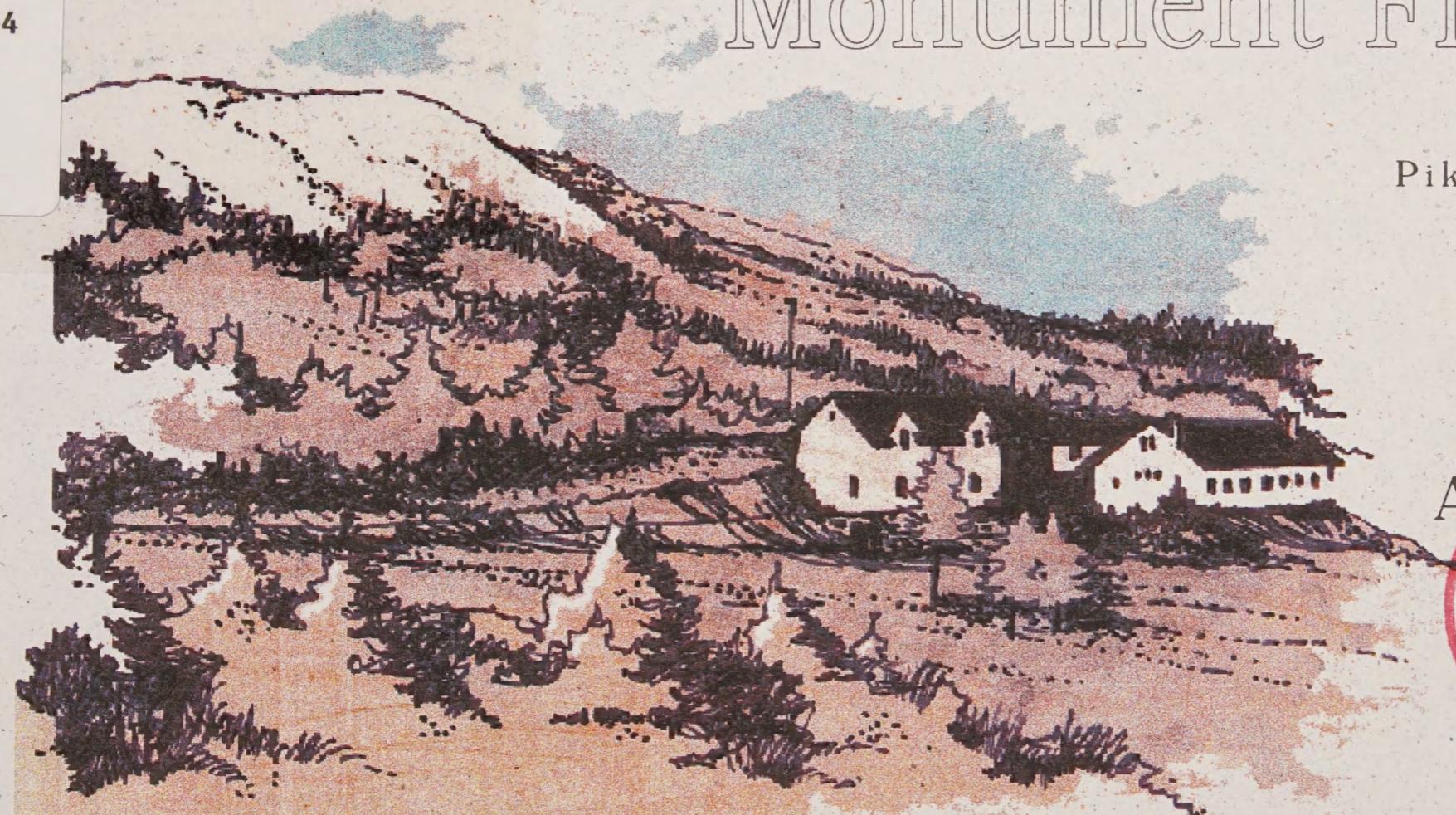
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Monument Fire Center

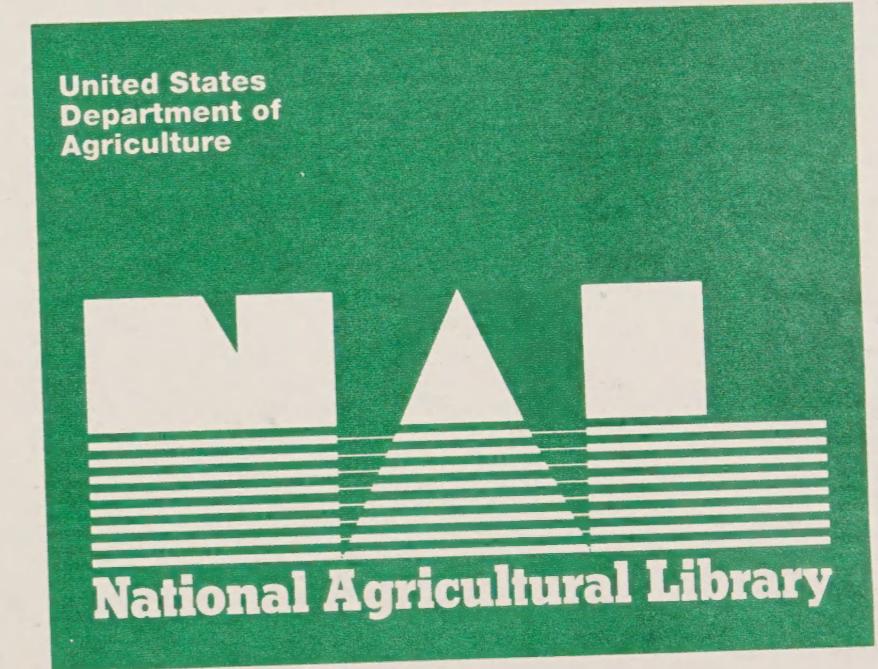
Pike National Forest
Pikes Peak Ranger District



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Forest Service Employees pose before the nursery gate – 1925.



Welcome from Pikes Peak District Ranger



We are proud to bring you the story of the Monument Nursery, now called the Monument Fire Center. The area has a long and colorful history, beginning with its establishment as a nursery in 1907, to its current day headquarters for two national wildland fire fighting crews.

Its original purpose as a nursery was to provide tree seedlings for National Forests in the surrounding five state area making up the Rocky Mountain Region, areas that had been heavily logged or destroyed by large wildfires. It served in that capacity for 58 years. Many residents of Monument may have either worked at the nursery or

know others that did. In the late 30's and early 40's the Civilian Conservation Corp established a camp at the nursery. The residents of Monument saw hundreds of young men come and go from the train station as they fulfilled their 6 month hitch. Today we still enjoy and appreciate the results of their work. The Mt. Herman and Rampart Range Roads are examples.

Currently the area is being transformed into a fire training and demonstration center. The transformation began in 1979 with the stationing of the Pike Hotshot Crew at the center. In 1996 a Helitack Crew was added. Planning and development is currently

underway to show how it is possible to live in a wildland area, subject to fire, safely. An important aspect is the renovation of the buildings using fire resistant materials while protecting and enhancing their historical character. The Pikes Peak Wildfire Prevention Partners and The Colorado Historical Society are important partners in helping make this project a reality.

Thank you for visiting the Monument Fire Center. We believe you will find it an interesting and worthwhile experience.

William R. Nelson
District Ranger

Step Back In Time



Gaze west to the dark forests which cloak the Front Range of the Rockies. Graced by crystalline streams, and home to a vast array of wildlife, these timberlands remain a natural sanctuary from the hectic bustle of the urban world below. Look again at these forested flanks, and imagine a different scene. Imagine the mountains devoid of forest, where unchecked and unrestrained logging have left a barren world of muddy creeks and vanished wildlife. Imagine these slopes being scorched by uncontrolled and uncontested fires, where the lives and property of nearby residents were threatened time and time again.

We are fortunate that such scenes can be left to the imagination. They do, however, illustrate a fact that is easily overlooked: that our lives would be much different if no one made the effort to safeguard our forests. For the last century, the men and women of the United States Forest Service have taken that responsibility for the health and sustainability of our forests and their resources. Because of this critical role, the activities of the Forest Service have had a major influence on the history and development of the region. Few places illustrate this mission more than the Monument Fire Center.

As you wander through the grounds of the Monument Fire Center, you'll be immersed in the history of the Forest Service and the important mission that it has undertaken of caring for the land and serving people. Established in 1907 as the Monument Nursery, the center was one of the first such nurseries in the fledgling National Forest System, an important cog in the Forest Service's first critical endeavor — the reforestation of public lands devastated by random logging and fire. In 1920, the site was selected to be home to the "Memorial Grove", established in memory of deceased Forest Service employees from the

Rocky Mountain region. During the Great Depression, the center became home to one of Colorado's largest Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) camps. Famous for the high-quality roads, trails, and buildings that they constructed, the colorful stories of the CCC men belie the despair and desperation of that era. In the 1970's the nursery was transformed to help accomplish another critical Forest Service endeavor — wildfire management. As a base for elite firefighting crews, called "Hotshots", the center remains a top-notch training site for firefighters that gather here each summer. The center's legacy continues, as it

becomes a focal point for another increasingly important Forest Service mission — education and stewardship of our nation's public lands.

It is with this mission in mind that we invite you to experience all that the Monument Fire Center has to offer. Step back in time to learn about the nursery's significance and the effect it had on the forests we see today. Examine the remaining handiwork of the CCC crews, and imagine what life was like for those young men coming of age in such a trying era. Find out what it is like to be a "Hotshot" or "Helitack" crew member, and learn about the latest in fire prevention techniques for your

home and community. Your visit to the Monument Fire Center will not only enlighten you of the positive contributions of the Forest Service, but will also allow you to relive a piece of our nation's colorful history.

The Monument Nursery



When W.H. Gardner and Allen S. Peck were dispatched by the Bureau of Forestry to survey the forests of the Pikes Peak region, they found an ecosystem that was "generally in poor health and in some areas devastated". By 1903, when the two made their journey, these timberlands had been subjected to almost 50 years of unchecked logging and grazing, and had been ravaged by at least two major fires. They determined that because of this, half of the forested lands in this part of the Pikes Peak Timberland Reserve were reproducing either too slowly to sustain themselves, or not at all! These portions of the forest —

totaling 80 square miles — would have to be replanted.

In response to these findings, the Bureau of Forestry established three small tree nurseries in the mountains southwest of Colorado Springs the following year. Their mission was to grow seedlings that could be transplanted into areas denuded of trees. However, within 2 years, the nurseries were deemed failures, due to poor soil, short growing conditions, and the inaccessibility of the sites. Meanwhile, the Pikes Peak Reserve, and two other reserves in the Front Range area, the Plum Creek and South Platte were

combined into the Pike National Forest. This greatly expanded the role and importance of a nursery.

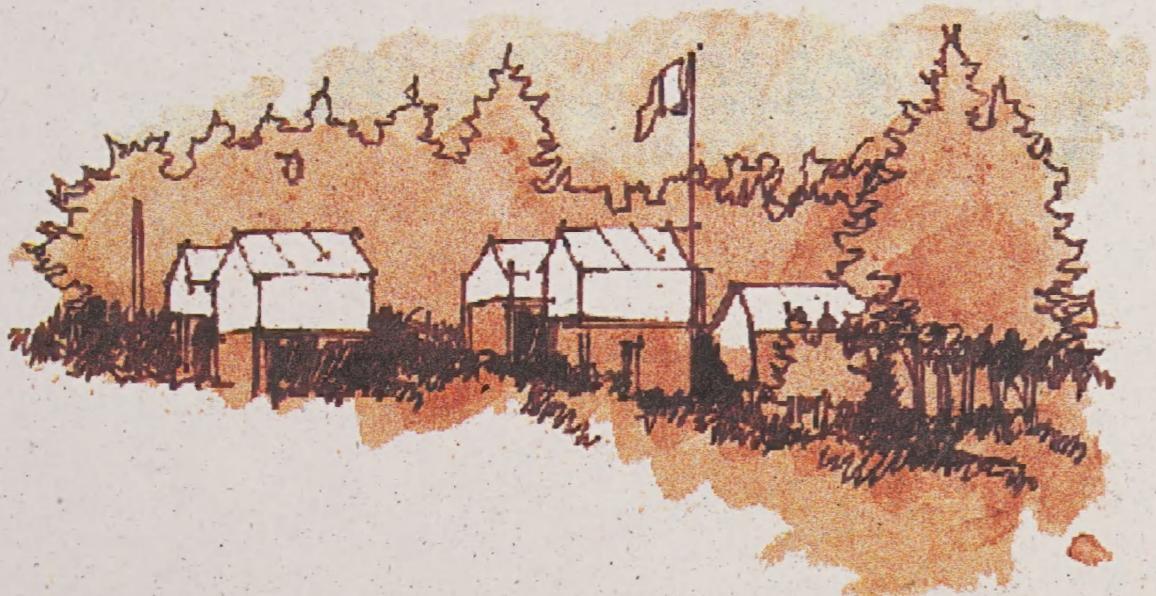
In late 1906, a new site for a nursery was suggested — a site that met the criteria for success. It was located at a lower elevation than the previous nurseries, thus it had a longer growing season. The soil at the site was much more fertile, and promised to be more productive. Finally, there was easy rail access, which allowed efficient transport of seedlings to other areas needing reforestation. The site was approved, and on May 1, 1907, the Mt. Herman Planting Station was established. Within 2 years, the name was

changed to the Monument Nursery.

In its 58 years of operation, the Monument Nursery served a critical role in the effort to increase the health of forests throughout the region. In each of those 58 years, millions of conifer seedlings, including Douglas-fir, Engelmann spruce, Western yellow pine, Limber pine, and Bristlecone pine, were grown and shipped. During its first few years, trees from the nursery were used primarily in the Pike National Forest and other nearby forests. One of the earliest reforestation successes was on Mt. Herman. Rising just west of here, Mt. Herman was nearly barren of



Ponderosa pine cones.



Typical Tent Camp.

trees after intense fires from the 1880's. Within 20 years of operation, thriving seedlings from the nursery transformed the mountainous slopes from an ugly black and red scar to the healthy green of a young forest. As growing techniques improved, and transportation became less costly, the nursery became one of the most important in the Rocky Mountain Region. Through the years, seedlings grown here were used in national forests from New Mexico to South Dakota, and for windbreaks on prairies from Texas to Iowa.

As you may imagine, the nursery was run in a highly organized

manner — with as many as 20 million seedlings being grown at once, it had to be! Cones of the various species had to be collected so that their seeds could be extracted from the cones. There were a number of methods used to collect cones, but one of the most common was to raid the stashes of the local squirrel population! Seed extraction was a three step process. First, the cones were cleaned, then placed in a drying room where they were roasted for several days at 200°F to 300°F which caused the cones to open. Some of the seeds could be removed from the cones at this time, but the remainder were

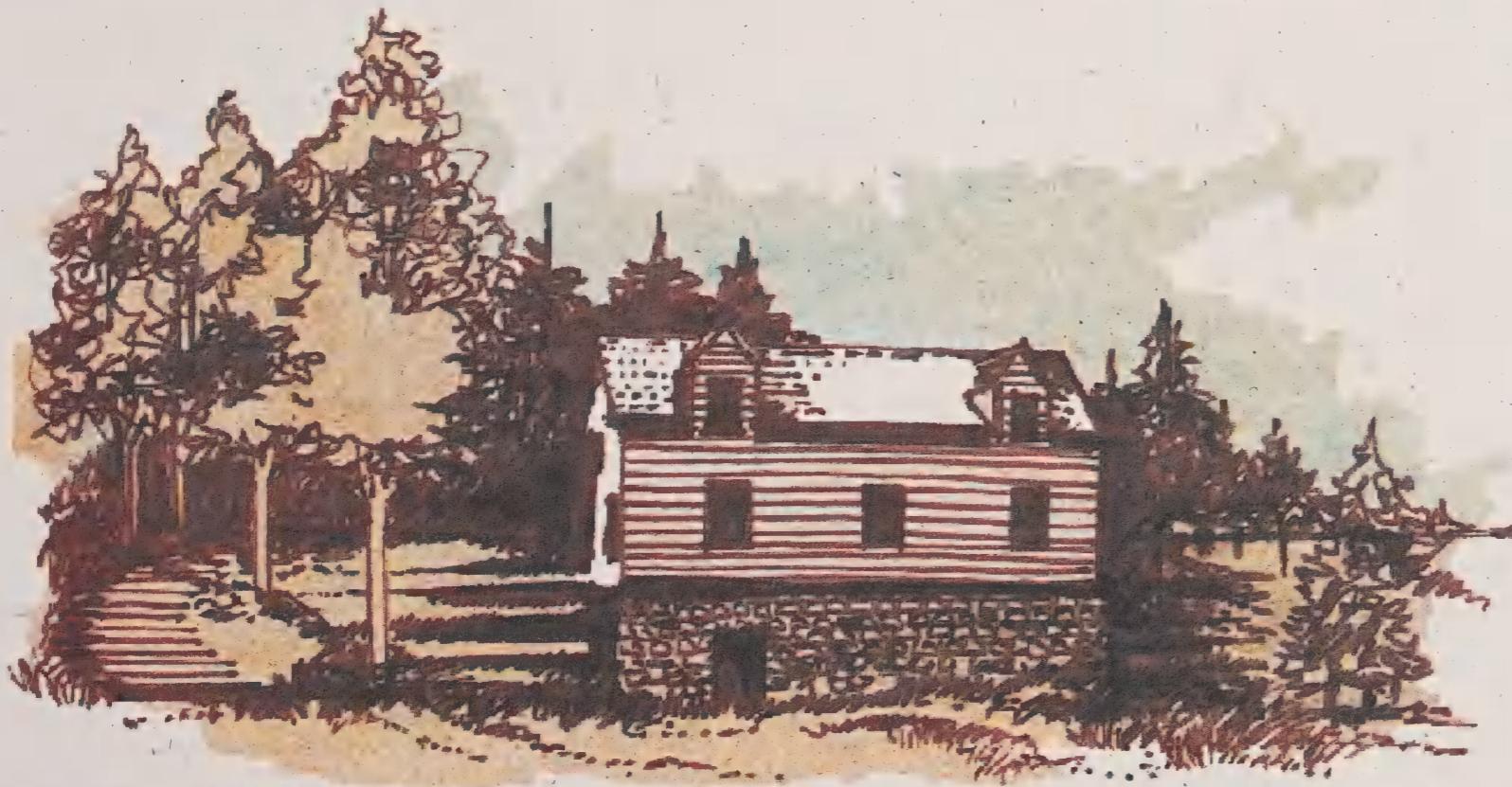
gathered when the cones were shaken in large tumblers. After being bagged, the seeds were stored at sub-freezing temperatures in a rodent-proof building.

Seeds for most tree species were sown during the autumn, about a year after being removed from the cones. The seeds were planted in order to produce a hundred trees per square foot! When germination began the following spring, the nurserymen covered the seedlings with a slatted wooden frame, which protected them from birds and rodents as well as providing necessary shade. Pieces of canvas draped over the frames

protected the young trees from injury in times of frost.

Two years after germination, the trees were moved to "transplanting beds", giving them room to grow. Because the transplanting process was critical to the healthy growth of the seedlings, special care was taken by the nurserymen. When the seedlings were dug up, they were placed into a board with slots large enough to support their trunks. A spring-loaded slat held the trees in place as the board, which could transport 72 trees at a time, was moved to the transplanting beds. The board was held over a trench





The Seed Extractory Building.

while soil was packed around the young tree's roots. The board was then removed, and the process was complete.

After being allowed to grow an additional year, the final step was the packing process, in which the trees were removed from the ground and readied for shipment. After being dug up a second time, the roots were boxed in moss, and the young trees were placed in a cold storage building. Here they remained, safely dormant, until they were shipped to their ultimate destination.

When the nursery was first established, it consisted of 480 acres

with a barn, and five tent houses for the crew. One of the members of that first crew was Walter Schrader, then a recent graduate of the state agricultural college in Ft. Collins. Less than a year after he turned the first shovel of earth in the nursery's first seedbed, Schrader was named the superintendent — officially, the "Chief Nurseryman" — a post he would hold for 36 years. Under his guidance, the nursery steadily grew in size and scope. More permanent quarters were built, water storage ponds were constructed, and tree growing operations began in earnest. The nursery was greatly expanded in

1929 when the adjacent Monument Ranch was purchased. The late 1930's proved to be the nursery's peak production years, with more than 60 employees, and as many as 5 million seedlings shipped annually. Also during the late 1930's, a new seed extractory building, cold storage building, blacksmith shop, and a beautiful new residence for Schrader and his family were constructed. These buildings remain the primary structures at the Monument Fire Center. As for Walter Schrader, he retired from the Forest Service in 1943, and died in 1962. In all, he spent almost half of his life as the

Chief Nurseryman at the Monument Nursery. Imagine being able to claim that longevity in your career. Few of us ever will.

The beginning of the end for the nursery came in 1950, when a severe drought wreaked havoc upon many of the young seedlings that were being cultivated. Thought was given to closing the nursery down, but no action was taken at that time. In 1960, it was determined that the rising cost of seedling production was rendering the nursery less and less economical. The final blow came in 1963, when a winter of harsh winds destroyed many of the seedlings in

that year's crop. Soon after, it was decided that nursery operations for the Rocky Mountain Region's forests could be handled more efficiently at a site near the town of Basalt. The death warrant had been signed, and the Monument Nursery came to an end on June 30, 1965.

The CCC Years

One of the historical high-lights at the Monument Fire Center came at a time considered by many to be one of this century's darkest periods — the Great Depression. The stock market crash and the resulting closure of many banks, combined with the unfortunate coincidence of one of the worst droughts on record, left the nation's economy in shambles, and millions unemployed. One of the programs initiated by President Franklin D. Roosevelt, to provide jobs for out-of-work Americans, called for the conscription of young men between the ages of 18 and 25 into a civilian army — one that would build, repair,

and maintain public infrastructure around the country — the Civilian Conservation Corps.

Known as the "Tree Army", the CCC was considered a poor stepchild to the Armed Forces, nonetheless, the CCC provided an invaluable service, and their efforts remain highly visible even after more than a half-century. In Colorado, the concerts we enjoy at the Red Rocks Amphitheater, the picnics at Palmer Park, and the scenic drives on Rampart Range and Mt. Herman Roads are all possible only because of the hard work and dedication of the CCC men.

The CCC played a very important role in the operation of the Monument Nursery. From 1934 until 1942, the majority of work at the nursery was done by CCC crews. The CCC designed and constructed the new Seed Extraction Building, Tree Packing Shed, Blacksmith's Shop, and the Schrader family's new home during their time at the nursery. Today, these buildings are among the finest examples of the distinctive CCC architecture to be found in Colorado.

Growing up during the Depression, you could have been one of the many who faced a difficult life with few prospects for improvement.

In such situations, the CCC provided one of the few opportunities for a brighter future. Besides earning an honest wage, you would have learned important job skills, as well as gained a level of education that may not have been possible in your hometown.

More importantly, the money you earned could pay for a month's rent and groceries for your family back home. Of your \$30 monthly salary, \$25 was sent to your family for just those expenses.

While enrollment in the CCC was based upon financial need, you didn't just hire on with the CCC — you enlisted. You were required to complete a minimum stint of 6



The Monument Nursery in its infancy.



months, and you could choose to re-enlist for up to 2 years. During your stint, you may as well have been in the Army — you slept in barracks, and even adhered to a dress code. In fact, many of the uniforms were World War I hand-me-downs. Those uniforms often didn't fit right, so if you had sewing skills, you could make money off your less-talented compatriots!

Like those enlisted into the military, the CCC men had no real say in where they were assigned. The majority of those who worked at the Monument Nursery were from towns and farms in Massachusetts and Texas. Many had never traveled away

from home, much less to Colorado. Imagine what it would have been like to leave home for the first time, to see the Rocky Mountains for the first time, and to experience snow for the first time!

Daily life was highly structured for the men of the CCC. Reveille was at 6:00 AM sharp, and after breakfast, each man was required to assist in "camp policing" — picking up any and all debris and litter from the grounds, and making sure everything was in tip-top shape. After inspection, the men were released to the Forest Service for the assignment of duties. Most were involved in the day to day operations

of the nursery, though some men were assigned to other projects — such as the construction of the new Mt. Herman Road. Still others remained at the camp where they worked for the army as cooks, clerks, and drivers. The most coveted jobs were those in machinery operations. Those lucky enough to gain these skills were almost assured decent jobs after their CCC days were over.

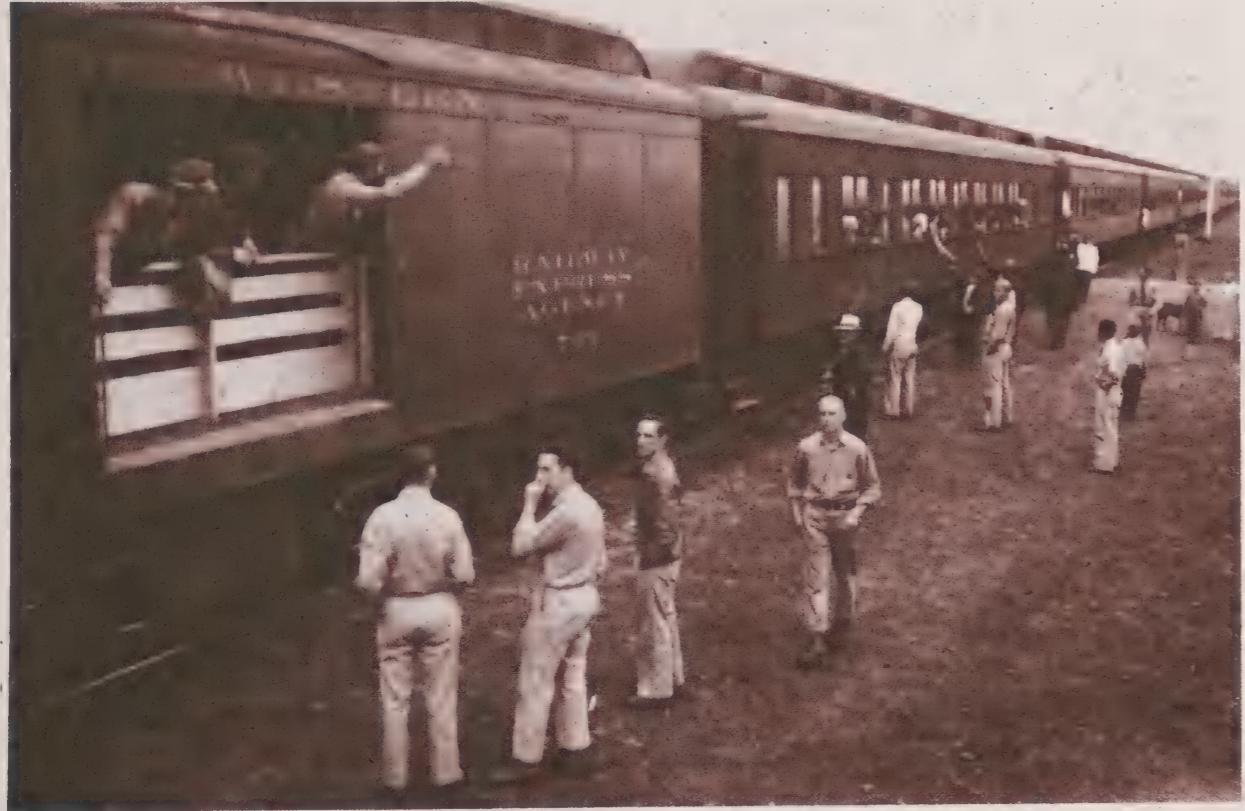
A hot lunch was usually delivered to the various work crews during the noon hour, and after a full afternoon of work, the men returned to camp for dinner at 5:00 PM. Evenings were busy times as well, with some men enrolling in first aid

or machinery maintenance classes, while others studied with local school teachers in order to earn their GED certificates. Recreation was important as well, with time for movies, games, and other entertainment frequently scheduled.

The quality of the food could often make or break the moral of the camp, and was often determined by the Mess Officer's level of interest and dedication. With the 35¢ per man, per day that was rationed to the CCC, the Mess Officer at Monument generally kept the men happy, though some of the men from the Boston area complained that baked beans weren't served often enough, while



Many of the CCC Era buildings still stand, including the old 5-bay garage (left) and pump house.



The last train-load of CCC men departs Monument Station after the camp's closing.

others from New Mexico felt there should be more in the way of tortillas and chili. Holidays were opportunities for luxuries such as fresh citrus and vegetables. For one Thanksgiving, the Mess Officer purchased a bag of avocados to be part of a salad treat. Assured by the enrollees serving as assistant cooks that they knew how to handle the avocados, the officer left them to prepare the salad. When finally served, the salad looked rather peculiar, so the assistants explained that they had had a hard time chopping up those "big nuts", but that they had eventually succeeded! And so it was that many CCC men

experienced the avocado for the first time — although without any of the meat, they probably weren't too impressed!

By the early 1940's, the nation's improving economy in conjunction with the start of World War II spelled the end of the CCC program. Many of the men enlisted in the military, glad to have had their CCC experiences, which they felt gave them a leg-up on the other new soldiers. Most looked back upon their time in the program with fondness, happy to have had the opportunity to make a future for themselves in what had been horribly bleak times. As Allen Dakan, a camp supervisor

explained, "The CCC life was a full life. There was something for the kids to do all the time." Though most of the three million young men who were a part of the program remain unknown to us, we owe a great debt of appreciation to the CCC, for the legacy they have left will continue to be enjoyed for many years to come.



The Memorial Grove



Honoring employees from the Rocky Mountain Region, which includes Colorado and parts of Wyoming, Nebraska, Kansas and South Dakota, the Memorial Grove at the Monument Fire Center remains an important part of the Forest Service tradition. The grove was established in 1920 to memorialize those employees killed during World War I, and on May 20, 1921, the first planting ceremony was conducted, with 30 Blue spruce trees being planted — one for each of the deceased. In later years, the Memorial Grove was expanded to honor the memory of all deceased

Rocky Mountain Region employees.

It was decided that instead of planting a tree for each deceased employee, one tree would be planted annually and a plaque would be mounted that listed the names of all who had died within the previous year. The annual memorial is held in the Spring of each year and it is hoped that more Forest Service employees, retirees, family members, CCC members and local residents will visit the site to honor the past and enjoy the tradition.



The Memorial Grove – a tribute to deceased Forest Service Employees.

The Monument Fire Center

The irony is inescapable. On a windy Friday afternoon, fire came to the Monument Fire Center. Ignited by an arsonist in April of 1989, the so-called "Berry Fire" rushed towards the historic structures of the Forest Service firefighter base before veering west and scorching the face of Mt. Herman. Miraculously, no one was injured, and no buildings were damaged. Though the slopes are once again green thanks to a healthy regeneration of shrubs and other plant life, burned snags still dot the area, and the scar on the mountain remains visible from miles away — a reminder to all who pass that fire will

always be a part of the landscape.

While the old nursery and the days of the CCC provide a deep sense of history, it is its ongoing role as a base for firefighters that helps redefine the legacy of the Monument site. Two of the Forest Service's elite firefighting teams are based here — a Helitack crew and the Pike Hotshots. Firefighting has always been one of the Forest Service's most crucial missions, and both of these teams play an important part in that effort.

Though fire management remains one of the most controversial issues that land management agencies

must face, understanding who these people are will allow us a greater appreciation for the role they play, not only in the community, but across the country.

From the very start, fighting blazes that threatened the nation's timberlands was one of the most important duties of a forest ranger. In the early days, the ranger and fewer than a handful of others would do what they could to extinguish fires, using only handtools and horses. Often, local residents had to be recruited to help, and it was only with their assistance that the effort was successful. By the 1930's, improved

equipment and increased manpower — including help from CCC camps — made aggressive firefighting much easier, and thus attempts at “total suppression” of blazes were made. This policy of controlling all fires as quickly as possible has continued until recent years.

Ecologists have come to realize how important fire is to the overall health of natural ecosystems, and they have begun to understand the changes occurring in these ecosystems due to total suppression. Many of the forest communities found in the Rockies depend on regular fires to help keep them stable, and

some even require fire for the growth of a new generation of trees. This knowledge has come at a time when Mother Nature has begun fighting back after decades of suppression. In recent years, fires of greater intensity and duration than those in the past have occurred with greater frequency. In response, fire managers have had to redefine their mission in order to meet new goals. First, help nature repair itself by allowing fire — both natural and prescribed — to once again become a part of the environment. Secondly, be prepared to battle blazes that are much larger than would typically occur. This has



One-time nursery buildings, used today as headquarters for Hotshot and Helitack crews.



become especially critical as housing developments in mountain and foothill environments has boomed.

During the CCC era, men who were enrolled in the program were often drafted to help fight fires in the national forests. After several seasons, there emerged groups of men who became especially skilled and interested in taking part in suppression activities. When the call came for assistance, those men who were first out the door became known as "Hot Shots". Long after the CCC ceased to exist, the Forest Service and other land management agencies began training crews specifically for firefighting duties, instead of relying

on the rangers and civilian volunteers. With a nod to tradition, some of these crews were dubbed the Hotshots. In the years since, the name has stuck, and today the Pike Hotshots are one of 66 teams positioned around the country.

The Pike Hotshots consist of 20 men and women who work as a team during the typical fire season: May through September. Though based here, they can be sent anywhere in the country — and even to Canada — to help battle fires. The Hotshots are usually called in when a fire might expand beyond the capability of the local firefighting resources. When the alarm goes out,

the crew is notified and assembled for transport to the scene. Once at the fire, they can assist in any duties necessary, either directly on the fire line, or in a support role. If there are multiple fires burning around the country, the Hotshots will usually stay on the scene only until the fire is contained. If it is less busy, they may stay on through the duration of the blaze. The total number of fires to which the Hotshots are called can vary greatly from year to year. In 1991, when the summer was unusually mild, they were assigned to only a single blaze. In 1994, one of the worst fire years of the century, the Pike Hotshots were called to over

75!

The Helitack crew serves a different function: "initial response". When a potentially threatening fire is reported, this team of seven is sent immediately to begin control efforts. Unlike "Smokejumpers", who parachute into remote areas, the Helitack crews are transported to strategic locations by helicopter. While the Pike Hotshots have been at Monument since 1979, the Helitack crew was assigned to the Fire Center in 1996. Having both units based here is a boon to firefighting efforts throughout the region.



The fire cache can be a busy place during dry summers.

The Future

In 1996, the old Monument Nursery was officially listed on the State Register of Historic Places. Having the site recognized for its unique and significant heritage has been an important goal for the Forest Service. Having accomplished this, sights have now been set on restoring the nursery's surviving structures, while allowing the center to become a place of interest and education for the public.

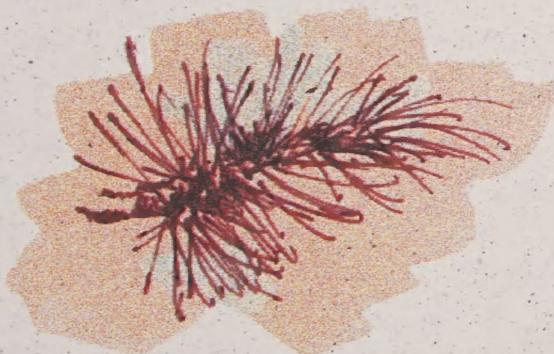
With support from the Colorado Historical Society and the Pikes Peak Wildfire Prevention Partners, the Forest Service plans to

begin the restoration of the center's deteriorating buildings. The mission that will be accomplished is threefold. First, by renovating the buildings — which date from the late 1930's — the historical integrity of the center will be ensured for years to come. Secondly, the renovation will allow for safer and more comfortable living and working quarters for the firefighting crews based here, while permitting the center to expand its role as a training center for local, state, and federal agencies from across the region. Finally, the Forest Service plans to make the renovation a

showcase for the use of fire-prevention techniques in the preservation of historic structures. By demonstrating the latest in fire-resistant materials and landscaping, it is hoped that homeowners and other parties will be encouraged to take steps to protect their property before a major blaze threatens.



Farewell



There is more to the Monument Fire Center than meets the eye. Search through its past, and you will find many interesting stories. Strolling across its grounds, you will find many hints of its heritage, and the role it has played in the history of the region. Arrow-straight lines of tall conifers recall the seed beds and wind breaks of an important nursery. The beautiful lines of the caretaker's house, and the sturdy construction of other buildings are a tribute to the skill and quality of the men once enrolled in the Civilian Conservation

Corps. The scarred slopes of Mt. Herman remind us of the center's ongoing mission.

We hope that this interlude into the past has illuminated you to the various roles the Forest Service once — and still — plays in the community and the region. Our invitation remains open: Come and visit the Monument Fire Center, and experience for yourself what the past, present, and future holds for our national forests, and our management of them.

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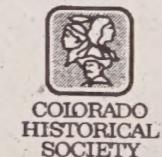
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